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■ BEYOND WESTMORELAND

The Right's Attack On the Press

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The outcome of the Westmoreland trial is a gain for America—the America of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. But for the political movement that funded and supported it, the case is merely a lost battle. The New Right's war against the mass media continues unabated and that outcome is still in doubt.

In their quest for political power, the energetic and ambitious leaders of the New Right (many of whom now call themselves "conservative populists") regard the media as a formidable barrier. The problem, as they see it, is that the media is controlled by liberals, who are their natural enemies. The leaders' animus toward the media appears to be shared by their foot soldiers, the millions of "social conservatives" concentrated in the Sun Belt and the Midwest, who support a "pro-family" agenda and respond favorably to appeals for patriotism and a strong national defense.

Central to the thinking of the movement is the idea that the media is now the dominant force in America. Patrick Buchanan, the President's recently appointed Director of Communications, argued in 1977 that the main obstacle to the victory of conservative forces in this country was not the Democratic Party but the liberal media. Kevin Phillips, one of the right's most admired theorists, maintains that the old political parties have "lost their logic." He says, "Effective communications are replacing party organizations as the key to political success." It follows then that to take power—as opposed to winning an election—the right must capture the liberal media, lock, stock and barrel.

Phillips and other New Right social critics lean heavily on the theory of elites propounded by the early twentieth-century sociologists Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca, who, not coincidentally—since elite theory counters the concept of class conflict—strongly influenced the young Mussolini and early Italian Fascism. New Right analysis, following another line trod by Italian Fascism, claims a unity of interest among "producers": business, labor and agriculture. "The basic economic and political split in America today," according to William A. Rusher, publisher of *National Review*, "is no longer between 'business and labor' but between 'producers and non-producers.'"

Among the nonproducers are the print and electronic media, part of a "verbalist" elite that battens on the hide of the hard-working producers. Rusher believes this unjust situation should not be permitted. So does Samuel T. Fran-

cis, a former policy analyst for the Heritage Foundation and now a legislative assistant to North Carolina Senator John East. He cites the media as one of those "power preserves of the entrenched elite whose values and interests are hostile to the traditional American ethos and which is a parasitical tumor on the body of Middle America. These structures should be leveled."

Although the New Right believes that the Presidency will continue to be held by conservatives, they see liberals clinging to control of the all-powerful media. In this situation, they sometimes regard the First Amendment as a weapon used by their enemies. How to convince people that the First Amendment is not sacrosanct? The New Right has already broached that touchy subject.

An article by Kevin Phillips in *Human Events* on January 13, 1973, was titled "Is the First Amendment Obsolete?" To which Phillips answered "Yes," noting, "'The Public's right to know' is a code for the Manhattan Adversary Culture's desire to wrap the 1st Amendment around its attack on the politicians, government and institutions of Middle America."

Two years later in a book titled *Mediocracy*, Phillips pursued the argument:

The Bill of Rights is hardly a static legal concept. . . . perhaps the First Amendment may undergo a shifting interpretation . . . to reflect the new status of the communications industry. The media may be forced into the status of utilities regulated to provide access.

Phillips gave no specific details as to how the media was to be "regulated." But in 1981 some extraordinary suggestions were offered by James L. Tyson in *Target America: The Influence of Communist Propaganda on U.S. Media*. Tyson, who lists as his past affiliations the Office of Strategic Services (precursor to the Central Intelligence Agency), Time-Life International and I.B.M. World Trade Corporation, proposes that a government official be stationed at each of the three major television networks to check news stories for fairness and accuracy. The networks have "become so powerful in opinion formation that national survival demands some assurance that they will not be free to disseminate the misinformation and distortions that have occurred in recent years," he writes. "In a word, TV news has become much too important a matter to be left to TV newsmen."

As a "solution to this problem," Tyson offers what he terms a preliminary recommendation. He would "require an ombudsman for each major network . . . appointed by an independent outside body such as the FCC." This individual would see that the Fairness Doctrine is adhered to and would insure that the networks follow "expert advice" on issues like "the neutron bomb, nuclear power, or our policy in Indo-China."

Several New Right groups, including the American Security Council and the National Strategy Information Center, assisted Tyson with his research. But what gives his book the imprimatur of the New Right is the endorsement of Reed Irvine, the movement's pre-eminent media maven. When

Walter Schneir and Miriam Schneir are working on a book about the New Right and the media.